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AUTHOR West, David A.
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ABSTRACT

Midcareer change programs and alternatives for early retirement for college faculty are considered based on the current situation of declining or stable student enrollments, diminished faculty mobility, and increased numbers of tenured faculty. Midcareer change programs fall into two general categories: (1) retraining programs designed to enable faculty members to move from their current disciplines or specialties into other areas with newer and/or greater student demand; and (2) faculty internships and fellowships in private industry or government for a summer or year. Most early retirement programs are relatively unsuccessful, but one includes a reversible component enabling faculty members to try partial retirement with the option of reacquiring full-time faculty status if they determine that early retirement was premature. Three alternatives exist: (1) provision of direct front-end cash settlement before the age of mandatory retirement (i.e., to buy up a faculty member's contract with full or partial payment; (2) provision of early annuity programs, either individual or group-based and with or without partial employment; and (3) the reversible early retirement program. The effects of these options on faculty morale in times of retrenchment are considered. (SW)

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FACULTY MORALE AND CAREER CHOICE IN THE 1980'S

David A. West
Faculty Council Chairman
University of Missouri - Columbia

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The college and university environment of the 1980's appears characterized by static to declining total enrollments, budget reallocations and declines plus abolition of mandatory retirement, resulting in relatively fewer positions for new faculty members, a decline in faculty mobility and thus a diminution of institutional choice for faculty in general. Consequently, faculty of all institutions from coast to coast will face greater emotional stress such as is experienced in any kind of entrapment; and with that stress they will experience more boredom, resentment, pain, withdrawal, guilt and failure. Not a pleasant state to contemplate.

Numerous faculty development programs, including some of the mid-career change and early retirement variety, have already been proposed and utilized, mostly with limited success, but much more evaluation and experimentation are necessary for the maintenance of high faculty morale and productivity. We must not only devote resources to refurbishing and remodeling our physical capital; we must also devote resources to renewing and restoring our faculty if the educational environment of the 1980's is to be the kind of experience both students and faculty desire and deserve. These programs should emphasize the need to increase faculty choice, to revitalize the existing faculty and to maintain the human capital already being devoted to higher education. By emphasizing the need to maintain and improve faculty morale, to increase faculty choice, and to make such choice truly voluntary--albeit accompanied by incentives--and by providing a series of reversible options to faculty, the stigma sometimes associated with faculty development programs can be substantially avoided.

HE 013 191

In this milieu, leadership from faculty governance bodies can facilitate faculty acceptance of such programs, existing or newly established employee

assistance programs can expand naturally into faculty development emphases, personnel offices can avoid targeting undesirables as intended recipients (either actual or perceived), and administrators at all levels can be expected to support such programs as a way to emphasize quality adjustments at their respective institutions. Faculty development plans can be managed to achieve resource reallocation, but faculty acceptance is much more likely when faculty development programs are indeed designed to improve faculty morale and productivity by providing greater free choice, rather than as simply a way to save money.

Mid-career change programs fall into two general categories:

(1) Faculty retraining programs are designed to enable faculty members to move from their current disciplines or specialties into other areas (related or otherwise) with newer and/or greater student demand. For example, if enrollment in engineering were expanding rapidly while enrollment in chemistry declined, some professor of chemistry might be enticed into a retraining program that would provide greater facility in teaching mathematics. On smaller campuses, utilization of faculty members in multiple disciplines has been an expected part of one's teaching responsibility all along; but on larger campuses with greater departmentalization and research emphases, shifting of faculty members across departmental lines is much less common and much more difficult to achieve. The four formal university retraining programs in Florida, Pennsylvania, New York and Wisconsin have not been particularly successful. (Carl V. Patton, Academia in Transition: Mid-Career Change or Early Retirement, ABT Books, Cambridge, Mass., 1979)

(2) Faculty internships and fellowships in private industry or government for a summer or year have been considerably more effective in renewing morale and enthusiasm; in some cases, as many as 50% of the program participants have not returned to teaching. In those cases in which faculty members have returned to the campus, their teaching and research interests have been broadened and/or redirected such that their morale and contributions have increased significantly.

OCT 2 8 1980

Those who elected not to return re-evaluated or so changed their professional interests as to find less personal value through working at their institutions and more satisfaction elsewhere. Although some faculty internship and fellowship programs were actually envisioned upon instigation as being designed primarily for less highly valued faculty, they nevertheless have been utilized in many cases by the more productive faculty. And although they will not end problems associated with less productive faculty members, internships and fellowships can ease these problems and provide an excellent means of revitalization and renewed enthusiasm for both the creative faculty members and their respective institutions.

In comparing the relative success of these two approaches to facilitating mid-career change, a crucial distinction is that those who participated in faculty internship and fellowship programs made reversible decisions; whereas those who entered faculty retraining programs made irreversible decisions. That is, if one takes a leave of absence to spend a year in Washington, one can return to the campus 12 months later; but if one retrains for a different teaching career, one can hardly return to the original discipline or department as readily. Although there may very well be a host of explanations for the striking difference in the success of these two approaches, my personal belief is that those faculty members who are given the opportunity to choose reversible options are much more likely to accept them and to profit by them. And after all, only to the extent that faculty members themselves are benefited by such development programs will still other faculty be encouraged to so participate; and only if these programs have a continuing viability will the institutions which establish and foster them be strengthened in any significant way.

In this current environment, naturally, early retirement programs have also been perceived as a means whereby additional faculty openings could be created. As total student enrollment stabilizes nationally and declines in some places, as faculty mobility diminishes, and as faculties across the country become more

fully tenured, the need for new faculty positions becomes ever more critical. In some cases, of course, early retirement programs are viewed as simply a way to get rid of the deadwood; in other cases, early retirement is seen as a means of eliminating or reducing the size of certain academic programs; in still other cases, early retirement is viewed primarily as a way to create additional opportunities for new, young scholars. Viewed from the perspective of faculty morale, early retirement programs can be emphasized as a means to greater free choice, a de-emphasis on indentured service and the amelioration of frustration.

Most early retirement programs are relatively unsuccessful, but only one includes a reversible component enabling faculty members to try partial retirement with the option of reacquiring full-time faculty status if they determine that early retirement was premature. Basically, three alternatives exist:

(1) One approach is to provide direct front-end cash settlement before the age of mandatory retirement; i.e., to buy up a faculty member's contract with full or partial payment. This approach may be especially suited to facilitating discontinuation of educational programs or program units in which tenured faculty members are housed. Such cash settlements are similar to the full-salary early-annuity and severance-payment contract terminations that have been used in non-educational settings for some years. Although cash settlements may be used with some success in private institutions, state colleges and universities may be much less able to effect cash settlement early retirements given their dependence upon legislative appropriations and their corresponding legal obligations.

(2) Another approach is to provide early annuity programs, either individual or group-based and with or without partial employment. Benefits for faculty members who retire early are made comparable to those they would have received at mandatory retirement age, sometimes with salary advancements until that age. In the case of early retirement without partial employment, equality may be achieved by providing additional direct payment to the early retiree until mandatory

retirement age is reached. At that time, in any instance, a supplemental annuity, purchased by the college or university, goes into effect and maintains a level of benefits equal to that being received by those faculty members who elected to remain full-time until mandatory retirement. Consequently, the negative impact of early retirement is lessened and monetary rewards are more equitable.

(3) A new approach is a reversible incentive early retirement program. Although it has not been in place long enough to determine its full effectiveness in facilitating faculty choice, productivity and morale, the key characteristic of this plan as compared with all others is its reversible feature. ("University of Utah Changes Mandatory Retirement Age," The Chronicle, January 8, 1979) As noted above in connection with mid-career change programs, providing faculty members with reversible options would seem to bode well for faculty acceptance and program success. Numerous other alternatives may yet be developed on various college and university campuses to provide reversible incentive gradual and early retirement variations, thus allowing for expanded late career choice and improving faculty morale.

Providing faculty members with reversible early retirement options should facilitate faculty productivity for not only those who choose to retire early but also those who choose to continue teaching full time. Just simply having the option to retire early without undue financial penalty would reduce some of the stress associated with being trapped and yet feeling less fulfilled in one's professional career. For those faculty members who elected to retire early in a gradual or phased program (perhaps teaching 75% the first year, 50% the second year, 25% the third, and not at all thereafter), full-time retirement could be accepted as an acquired skill, a learned experience; and for those faculty members who had more difficulty in accepting retirement than they had anticipated, such a program would provide full-time reinstatement at the faculty member's option. In any of these cases, faculty morale should also improve as a result

of such experimentation. The more options offered to the faculty, the more flexible the program, the larger the number of faculty members who would be enticed to so experiment. Salary reserves necessary to assure available salaries for all faculty who wanted reinstatement would be larger, of course, the more faculty who elected early retirement; but also the greater the size of the salary pool released as a result of such early retirement, and the greater the opportunity for faculty renewal and revitalization--whether through the opportunity to employ new, young scholars who could not otherwise be offered positions or through the re-employment of older faculty members refreshed and recommitted to their teaching and research efforts.

No one yet really has the final solution to these problems. Most existing mid-career change and early retirement programs have not proved viable and effective for faculty and their respective institutions. New alternatives must be developed if we are to further ensure acceptance in our changing educational environment. Such programs must be reoriented, thereby reducing stigma and avoiding the perception that they are designed to punish faculty for poor performance. In order to meet institutional objectives and to increase participation by faculty members, reversible options available on a voluntary basis should be initiated and they should be accompanied by legitimate incentives. This expansion of career choice would increase faculty morale and enthusiasm, facilitate faculty teaching and research efforts, and generally improve the educational environment on college and university campuses during the 1980's.